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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4607

INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0900

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9674

RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4170

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1626

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3352

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 6770

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 4385

RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0759

RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0760

RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0422

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2691

RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA 0056

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0335

RUEABND/DEA HQS WASHINGTON DC

RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000713

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP AND INL; DEA FOR OF, OFF; USPACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: SNAR KCRM BM

SUBJECT: DRUG OUTREACH PROJECTS IN NORTHERN SHAN STATE

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¶1. (U) Summary: UNODC-supported Outreach Projects appear effective in dealing with demand for narcotics and harm reduction for residents of northern Shan State. The GOB cooperates with NGOs to address drug abuse and associated problems, including high HIV/AIDS infection rates, but does not address the underlying economic causes. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On May 11, emboffs visited the Muse Outreach Project (MOP) and spoke with supervisor Dr. Denny, who is also Chairman of the Myanmar Anti-Narcotic Association (MANA), and with Myint Aung, General Assistant of MOP and Secretary of MANA. MANA includes both private sector and government representatives, and supports the MOP. MANA receives funding from UNODC, Japan and Australia. According to Dr. Denny, this close public/private collaboration allows MOP to operate fairly freely, and deflect police interference in MOP's dealings with intravenous drug users (IDUs), most of whom use heroin.

¶3. (SBU) With a staff of thirteen including a counselor and a nurse, MOP treats 15-20 addicts daily, and about 3,000 annually at a drop-in center, opened in June 2005. Outreach workers also distribute new, and collect old, syringes from IDUs. Dr. Denny noted that Muse's location on a major trade route exposed residents to the high drug use found among truckers. Active trade opportunities also encourage students to drop out and work, rather than continue schooling. Low cost keeps illicit narcotics within reach of many, even with limited financial resources. Contacts told us that, starting in 2002-2003, the GOB instituted tighter controls on the border crossings and on dealers in the city. Although illicit drugs are still available, they said, dealers are not so obvious, and they must hide from law enforcement officers. UNODC also supports police training for border officials to more effectively combat drug trafficking.

¶4. (SBU) To reduce the risk and spread of HIV/AIDS, MOP

distributes condoms and provides HIV/AIDS education at its clinic, through advertising and in local schools. Although the GOB doesn't allow him to reveal statistics, Dr. Denny told us that his research showed a slight drop in HIV infection rates in Muse IDUs from 51% in 2005 to 47% so far in 2006.

15. (SBU) International INGOs including CARE, PSI and AZG also operate in Muse. MOP counsels HIV positive patients, and AZG provides drug therapy to 200 HIV/AIDS patients. Dr. Denny estimates that each year, 70-100 AIDS patients die in Muse, a town of almost 150,000, though the rate declined slightly this year. The Muse clinic and drop-in center are open every day except holidays and weekends.

Lashio Outreach Project

16. (SBU) On May 12, Emboffs visited the Lashio Outreach Project (LOP) youth center and clinic and spoke with Director Dr. Htay Oung. Lashio has a population of over 250,000, including ethnic Burmans, various ethnic minorities, and many Chinese. LOP began work in January 2004, and coordinates regularly with the other four NGOs, MANA, CARE, Asian Harm Reduction Network and the Asia Regional HIV/AIDS Harm Reduction Pilot Project, that address drug use in different sections of the city. LOP's goals include: prevention of drug abuse by "at risk" youth; reduction of HIV/AIDS transmission among IDUs; and reduction of drug use.

17. (U) To encourage youths to avoid drugs, LOP offers numerous sports and art classes, vocational training and health education in schools and at LOP facilities. On the day we visited, the center was busy with children reading, watching television, playing ping-pong and learning guitar. Over 62,000 visitors have come to the center for services since September 2004.

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18. (U) To reduce harm from drug abuse, especially transmission of HIV/AIDS, LOP project workers distribute an average of 5,000 condoms a month and provide counseling and education for IDUs, distributing about 7,000 books and pamphlets monthly. Each month, outreach workers distribute new and collect used syringes; and refer approximately 10-30 new clients to LOP services. During the previous year, LOP treated between 627 and 1788 IDUs each month at the clinic. Dr. Htay Oung estimates that 50-75% of IDUs that LOP treats are HIV positive.

Drug Users

19. (SBU) According to Dr. Htay Oung, the police Anti-Narcotics Task Force found that many Lashio users have shifted from smoking drugs to injecting, because it is cheaper and more effective. Users under 25 years old predominantly inject heroin, while older users primarily smoke opium. One injection costs K.500-1,000 (approximately 40 to 80 cents at market exchange rates). Dr. Htay Oung also noted that, as in Muse, addicts have found it more difficult to buy drugs in the past few years because of heightened law enforcement. LOP operates a mobile team that travels to nearby Theinni to treat patients, and distribute condoms, syringes and information pamphlets. The demand is so great, according to Dr. Htay Oung, that LOP plans to open a new center in Theinni.

19. (SBU) Comment: UNODC's Muse and Lashio Outreach Projects have made impressive efforts to deliver services to drug addicts and reduce drug use. Extending the hours of operation would make them even more effective. Neither project, however, addresses one of the main causes of drug abuse: the lack of economic, agricultural and educational alternatives for residents of northern Shan State. Without government services and few prospects for economic security, some residents take advantage of trade opportunities, while

others, like the addicts we spoke with at the drop-in center,
seek escape from a bleak future. End comment.

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